THE JESTER. EVERY SATURDAY.

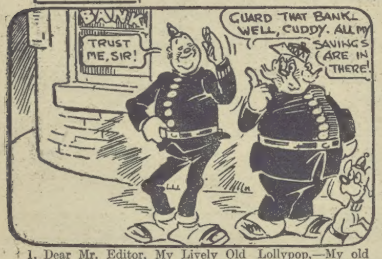
POCKET-MONEY PRIZES FOR READERS!

SEE PAGE 3.

No. 1,465.

THE COMICAL CAPERS OF CONSTABLE CUDDLECOOK!

DECEMBER 7, 1929.

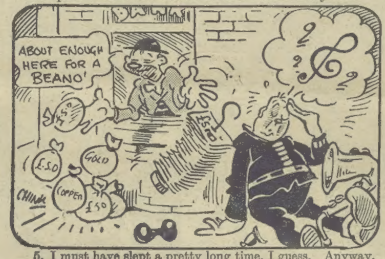


1. Dear Mr. Editor, My Lively Old Lollypop,—My old inspector, Flipflap, posted me on duty at the local dollar-depository the other day and he bade me keep an eye on it, for it seems he had quite four-and-eightpence in said bank.

2. Now, it wasn't long before I discovered that propping up a bank with my back was a trifle boring, and when a jolly old street musician haled in sight, complete with saxophone, I felt quite bucked and asked the old lad for a lively tune.

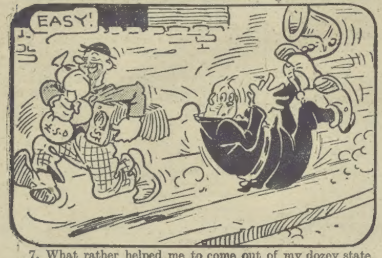
3. And having called the tune, sir, I sure had to pay the piper! Mps! You see, that laddie was not only a musician—he was a bit of a bad lad and he had a tune saved up for me that struck me all of a heap. Yes, and I only heard one note!

4. That one note was a loud "Dong!" from the dumb-bell which the bad lad had hidden in the old saxophone, and yet that one solitary note was enough to lure me to sleep. No sooner did I sink down than the bad lad got to business.



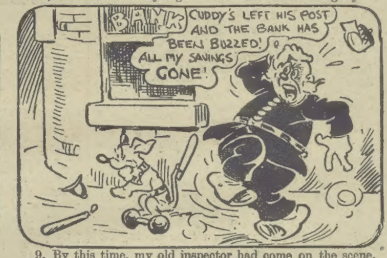
5. I must have slept a pretty long time, I guess. Anyway, it seems that I was still in dreamland when the bold, bad burglar came nipping out with a few bags of carefully selected quids and a long file of best new-laid banknotes—the bad lad!

6. Taking not the slighest notice of me, the bad lad grabbed his ill-gotten gains and started to wander away. Now, it so happened that just as he was about to dawdle down the road, I came out of my nightmare and rumbled things.



7. What rather helped me to come out of my dozey state was the fact that the bad lad, so anxious to get away, hooked me up by the coat-collar and dragged me down the road after him. Then I found his saxophone tangled between my feet.

8. I thought it was about time I played a lively tune, sir, and at the first opportunity, I anchored myself to a lamp-post and let go with a lovely double-kick. It was rather neat the way I handled that saxophone, sir. Ha, ha! Not half!



9. By this time, my old inspector had come on the scene, sir, and when he saw that I had gone and that the bank had been opened up a bit, he went all wobbly at the knees and nearly had a hundred fits! He thought he'd lost his cash!

10. Then I came into the picture once more, and trotting round the corner, I produced the bad lad quite wrapped up in his noise-machine and feeling very sorry for himself. "Beg to report capture of one bad lad, sir!" I said, with a smart salute, and Flippy started to caper for joy. "Why, if it isn't Saxophone Sam!" he said. "Three hearty cheers!"

11. There and then we all toddled back to the station, and in a short time Sam was washed and combed and pushed into a little spare cell. "Now I think we ought to celebrate, sir!" I said to Flippy. "I'll give you a little tune on the old whatsername!" Thereupon I rendered my favourite song at least fourteen times running!—Yours, CONSTABLE CUDDLECOOK.

Introducing Nobby.

"HEROES are born in all walks of life," commented old Tom Martin, the night-watchman. "You have only to read the names of our glorious V.C.'s to realise that. Lords and earls figure side by side with men in the humblest walks of life. Nobby Mason was a hero of a different kind, for Nobby sacrificed all he had for—— But there, let me begin from the beginning and tell you the story properly!"

Tom's youthful audience settled themselves more comfortably for the tale, and at once the old night-watchman began:

Nobby Mason handed over the coster's barrow which he had hired for the day, cheerfully paid its owner the one-and-sixpenny fee demanded, pulled his cloth cap a little more rakishly over his right eye, and with hands stuck deep in his trousers pockets set off quickly for his lodgings.

He had had a hard but successful day; the job lot of oranges that he had purchased in the early hours of the morning had been sold out, and Nobby was filled with that sense of tired satisfaction which comes to one who has done a good day's work cheerfully.

His thoughts now were centred on kippers and tea.

He knew "Ma." Harris, his landlady, would dish up grilled kippers for him as soon as he entered his humble lodging. Kippers were his favourite "fruit," as he was fond of saying, and Ma Harris always studied the likes and dislikes of her lovable little Cockney lodger.

As he turned into Phipps Court, where he had lived for the past twelve months now, Nobby became conscious of the fact that the policeman on the corner was eyeing him suspiciously. He also became aware of the fact that beside the constable was a man who was obviously a "busy"—in other words, a plain-clothes detective.

But Nobby's conscience was quite clear, and with a flip of his hand and a wink, he passed the police officers and ran lightly down the area steps to Ma Harris' kitchen.

Nobby sniffed appreciatively as he entered the kitchen and heard the satisfying sound of frizzling kippers coming from the direction of the stove.

But he looked hard at Ma Harris as he tossed his cap on to the rickety horsehair couch and seated himself at the table.

"What's up, Ma?" he said, with kindly concern. "You've been piping your eye! Who's been making you cry? It ain't——"

"It's—it's Jim, Nobby!" said the motherly Mrs. Harris. "You know, he—he came home very late last night! I—I didn't tell you before, but—but his 'ands were covered in blood, and—and he looked as if he'd been in a fight. He wouldn't tell me what happened. This morning he went off up North after that new job, and—and twice the police 'ave been here asking for 'im!"

"The cops!" said Nobby, frowning suddenly. "They say what they wanted 'im for? Jim ain't been doing nothing wrong, I'll lay a shilling!"

"They wouldn't tell me what my boy 'ad done," said Mrs. Harris, on the verge of fresh tears. "But I've 'eard as how a man was knocked down by someone last night. It 'appened at the top o' the court—just about the time Jim came home! I—I'm sure they want Jim for that! He—he'd been in a fight, I'm sure. It must 'ave been Jim that done it! Oh, Nobby, they'll pinch him and send him to gaol! My boy! And 'im not nineteen yet!"

Nobby was silent for a moment. Then he rose and pushed his kippers away from him untasted.

"Ma!" he said suddenly. "Don't you worry about Jim! The cops won't nab him—I'll see to that! Now listen to me! If the police start a-questioning you, all you've got to do is to tell them that Jim was home early last night. It was me what came in late with hands covered in blood, see? Ma! You been good and kind to me ever since I come out of gaol. But for you I'd never 'ave run straight. You and Jim did me a good turn. Now's my chance to pay you back something o' what I owe you, see? It was me that did the bashing job last night and——"

"But you was in 'ere all the evening, Nobby," said Mrs. Harris. "It couldn't 'ave been you!"

"But I tell you it was, and you got to stick to the story, see?" persisted Nobby. "I'm not letting Jim go to gaol—I seen too many good fellows go wrong permanent just because they made one slip. If they send Jimmy to quod at his age it might ruin him—make 'im bitter so that when he comes out he'll go wrong for good. Now, me—well, I'm an old gaol-bird. I've been through the mill and a few weeks in gaol won't hurt me. It's something I owe you, Ma, so you just keep your mouth shut about Jimmy, and back up my lay if the police come and ask you about me!"

"But—but I can't let you take the blame for something Jimmy did!" said Mrs. Harris. "And what's going to happen to your little business? You'll lose everything, Nobby—and you've been trying so 'ard to keep straight!"

"Blow the business!" said Nobby. "I can start again when I come out. You leave this to me, Ma! I'm going down to the station now—and I'm going to see to it that Jimmy don't get pinched! So long, Ma! It's up to you to back me up—don't forget that!"

Before Ma Harris could raise further protests, Nobby had seized his cap and darted up the area steps and down the court. In a very few moments he was outside the police station. For a moment or two he paused there as if thinking things over. His hesitation was but momentary. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he marched into the charge-room and straight up to the station sergeant's desk.

"'Evening, sergeant! How's your rheumatiz?" he greeted the officer breezily. "I hear you're looking for a cove what did a bashing job at the top of Phipps Court last night. Well, there's no need for you to look much farther. I'm him! Thought I'd save you trouble by giving myself up."

The sergeant fixed his grim eyes upon the little coster.

"H'm!" he said. "I wondered just how long it would be before you broke out again, Mason. So it was you, was it? Wait—there's a C.I.D. inspector on the case. I'll bring him in, and you can tell him what you have to say."

"H'm!" muttered Nobby. "More serious than I thought! Lummy! I mustn't arf o' bashed that bloke last night! Only 'ope I didn't kill him!"

Then with a resigned sigh Nobby lounged against the charge desk and waited for the Scotland Yard man to put in an appearance.

The Next Morning!

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR STEEDMAN entered the charge-room and smiled at Nobby in a friendly way. They said at Scotland Yard that Steedman had caught more crooks with that friendly smile than any other man with more obvious methods.

"Your name's Mason, isn't it?" he said. "Been up before, haven't you? Six months for assaulting the police, three months for picking pockets. H'm! So you confess to this assault case which occurred in Phipps Court last night? Well what have you got to say?"

"Nothing except that I did it!" said Nobby. "Knew you'd get me in the long run, so thought I'd save you trouble."

"I see," said the inspector. "And what did you do with the stuff?"

"Stuff?" echoed Nobby, feeling that he was on insecure ground.

"Stuff!" repeated the inspector. "The wallet that you took from the injured man after brutally assaulting him!"

"Oh, that!" said Nobby. "Well—er—I sort of got the wind up and threw it away. Didn't you find it in the court?"

"We didn't," said the inspector, and his lips set a little more tightly.

"That's funny!" volunteered Nobby helpfully.

"It is funny!" said the C.I.D. man. "Now, where did you go after you'd done the little job and had thrown the stuff away?"

"Straight home—Mrs. Harris'!" said Nobby promptly. He knew he was on safe ground there.

"I see, I see!" said the inspector. "Very well. Charge him, sergeant. On his own confession. I'll have him brought up before the magistrates to-morrow, and we'll apply for a remand for further inquiries. Take him away!"

"Evening, sergeant! How's your rheumatiz?" Nobby said breezily. "I hear you're looking for a cove what did a bashing job last night. Well, I'm him! Thought I'd save you trouble by giving myself up!"

Nobody but Nobby Mason knows what kind of a night he spent in the station cells.

Nobody knows or ever will know how he wrestled with himself at one time, calling himself several kinds of fool for shouldering another man's crime, and then consoling himself with the thought that it was for Ma Harris' sake.

"She's been more than a mother to me, and I can't do more than help her now!" he muttered. "It means quod for me—it means starting all over again now I've got on me feet. And maybe they'll give me an extra packet for being an habitual. Ah, well, it's all in the game! Reckon I've got to make the best of it!"

Nobby was about early the next morning after a restless night in the cell.

He knew the police court procedure perfectly.

He knew just how the magistrate would look at him, and had worked out just what he was going to say.

"Something a bit cheeky—make the crowd laugh!" he told himself. "Laughter in court! Lummy—if they only knew!"

It was ten o'clock when they shepherded him into the police wagon, and then escorted him into the police court.

Nobby was ready with his story when his name was shouted down the corridors.

He had brushed his hair into a sporty quiff and tied his choker in a very careful manner. On his face was a saucy smile as he winked confidently at the policeman who escorted him into the dock.

The clerk of the court read the charge. The magistrate looked over the top of his glasses at the prisoner and set his lips and frowned. Then a black-coated solicitor rose in the well of the court.

"I act for the police in this case, your worship," he said. "I am instructed to apologise to your worship for troubling you in this matter. The police do not desire to offer any evidence against the prisoner and request that he be forthwith discharged!"

"Hey, wait a minute!" cut in Nobby. "I——"

"Case dismissed! Stand down!" said the clerk sternly, and somewhat bewildered, Nobby found himself led away.

In one of the corridors of the court Nobby suddenly ran into Detective-Inspector Steedman. That astute officer smiled in his usual friendly way. Nobby wanted an explanation, and was determined to get it.

"Say, why didn't you carry on with the case?" he asked. "I confessed, didn't I? Surely that's good enough, ain't it?"

"You're a fool, Nobby Mason!" said the C.I.D. man. There was a note of genuine kindness in his tone, however. "We didn't proceed with the case because we knew you weren't the man we wanted. You fell into my trap easily last night!"

"Trap?" echoed Nobby. "What trap?"

The inspector laughed.

"I asked you what you did with the stuff!" he said. "You said you threw it away. I knew then that you didn't know what you were confessing to. The man who was assaulted last night was a uniformed constable!"

"But—but you kept me in the cell for the night!" said Nobby.

"Yes—because it was just possible that you had committed another assault, of which we had no knowledge. I kept you on hand in case we should need you. Then I checked up on your movements, and Mrs. Harris told me why you had confessed. It was to save her son, Jim, wasn't it?"

"Why couldn't you have took me?" said Nobby. "What does it matter to you who goes to quod so long as you've got somebody? Gaol wouldn't hurt me—it might ruin that youngster for life!"

"It matters a lot to us who goes to gaol," said Steedman sternly. "You're like a lot of other people—you think that if we get a man we'll nail him down whether he's guilty or innocent. That's not our way, Nobby! The only people we want in gaol are the guilty ones! I'm glad we've got our hands on the man that did that Phipps Court job. He'll get six months for that!"

"Poor old Jim!" said Nobby bitterly. "Sending a kid like that to gaol is a crime! What did he do it for? Why didn't he——"

"Listen to me, my lad!" said the inspector, suddenly dropping a hand on Nobby's shoulder. "Before you start in to sacrifice everything you've got in life, first of all make sure that the person you're doing it for is worth the sacrifice, and then make sure that the sacrifice is needed. If you'd have only sat tight last night you'd have learned the truth. Jim Harris didn't commit the assault on the constable last night. He was on the scene, and very gallantly came to the constable's aid! We wanted Jim Harris last night to get information from him which would help us get the man we were after. Both you and Mrs. Harris jumped to the wrong conclusion. Jim's no crook—he's a hero! But for his intervention that constable would have been killed last night! That's all I've got to say, Nobby! Now you get along home to Mrs. Harris! You'll find Jim there—and if I remember rightly I smelled kippers cooking when I called this morning! You'll just be in time if you hurry!"

Nobby did hurry. He half-suspected that the C.I.D. man was pulling his leg. But there, sure enough, was Mrs. Harris beaming across the table at her smiling son Jim.

"He's a hero, Nobby!" said Mrs. Harris proudly. "That nice inspector told me so himself; said the force was sure to recognise it in some material manner, as he says! And to think I thought he'd done something wrong when I see him all messed up like as if he'd been fighting! 'E had been fighting to 'elp the police! Yes, he's a 'ero!"

"Aw, cut it out, ma!" said the blushing Jimmy. "Anyway—'ero's another 'ero! Nobby—you did a fine thing, even though you was wrong in what you thought! But me and ma'll never forget what you was ready to do for us—will we, ma?"

"Aw, rats!" cried Nobby cheerfully. "If you've got anything more nice to say to me, say it with kippers! Come on, Ma! Dish us up a two-eyed steak!"

"You see what I mean when I say that heroes may be found in all walks of life?" concluded old Tom, with a smile. "I know you will agree with me that Nobby Mason certainly was a hero. Good-night, all!"

(Another complete tale told by old Tom Martin, the night-watchman, will appear in next Saturday's JESTER.)

7-12-29

"JUST WE THREE"

You will find laughter and tears in this human story of the adventures of two homeless brothers and their girl chum. START IT TO-DAY!

Peering over the banisters Joe saw three men stagger into the living-room, one with blood on his face. They were half carrying, half dragging between them the exhausted figure of Mr. Flannagan.

A Very Queer Party!

SLOWLY and silently the door of the little bed-room opened and Jimmy Blake, aged five, sat up in his small bed and peered with bright and rather startled eyes at the thin, bearded figure of the old man who came inside on tiptoe.

"Are we going now, Mr. Flannelfeet?" Jimmy asked.

"Sh-h!"

The old man put a finger to his lips and pointed upwards to where Jimmy's big brother Joe, and his chum, Jess, were sleeping.

"Quiet, my dear," the old man said in a husky whisper. "Don't let them hear you. This is a secret, remember! And also remember that I'm Mr. Flannagan—not Flannelfeet!"

Jimmy's heart beat quickly as Mr. Flannagan helped him to dress, and then picked him up and carried him quietly downstairs. He did not dream that this white-bearded old man and his friends who had given them food and shelter were crafty criminals, who had a cunning motive behind all their apparent kindness. Neither did Jess, though Joe had begun to be suspicious.

And when Mr. Flannagan promised to take Jimmy to a "secret party" that night, unknown to Joe and Jess, Jimmy never suspected that there was a crafty scheme behind it.

In the room below, clad in dark coats and caps, Mr. Slim was waiting with two of the men whom Mr. Flannagan had told Joe were detectives. Jimmy's eyes brightened as he saw them.

"Are you coming to the party, too?" he asked.

"Rather!" One of the men grinned and winked as he picked up from the table a set of skeleton keys and a pair of pliers popular with burglars. "We're coming," he said.

Jimmy moved forward, and peered with interest at the pliers.

"Is that to crack nuts with?" he asked.

The man's grin broadened.

"This ain't for cracking nuts, my son," he said in his harsh voice. "It's for cracking cribs!"

"Sh-h!" Mr. Flannagan let out the warning like a hiss and scowled at his companion. "Keep your tongue quiet, can't you, you fool!" he muttered, under his breath. "Do you want the kid to——"

"I had a crib when I was a baby," said Jimmy, "but I never cracked it. It had railings all round, and one day when me and Joe were playing boats in it the bottom fell out, and——"

"He didn't mean cracking 'em; he meant mending 'em, my dear," said Mr. Flannagan sharply. "Come on, you fellows! Are you ready?"

He glanced at Mr. Slim, who had picked up a small black silk mask from the sideboard and slipped it into his pocket—a movement which Jimmy's sharp eyes did not miss. Jimmy turned to the old man.

"Mr. Slim's got a funny poke-face," he said. "Is he going to make us laugh at the party?"

Mr. Flannagan frowned.

"Don't talk so much, my dear," he said. "Come on!"

He turned and took Jimmy by the hand, leading the way out along the dimly lighted corridor and down the winding staircase which led to the garage. It was more like a cellar than a garage, and the car which stood in it was covered right over with a big black sheet as if Mr. Flannagan did not want anyone to know he'd got one. He was a queer old man in some ways.

In a few minutes they were all in the car, which glided out silently into the street and sped off through the darkness at a speed which made Jimmy rock to and fro. It reminded him of that first night when he and Joe and Jess had been discovered in the railway wagon—when Mr. Slim had captured them and brought them home to Mr. Flannagan.

For some minutes the car roared on. Then there was a faint squeak of the brakes and the car swung round a corner into a lane where a high hedge threw a shadow so dark that the car was almost invisible. Mr. Slim and his companions sprang out lightly, followed by the old man and Jimmy.

"Where do we go now?" Jimmy asked.

"We stay here for a bit. And keep quiet," grunted Mr. Slim.

Standing in the shadow of the hedge Jimmy saw one of the men move off silently and turn through what seemed to be a small gate. Some minutes elapsed before he returned.

"All clear?" queried Mr. Flannagan anxiously.

"All clear," the man whispered.

Once more Jimmy felt his hand clasped in the moist palm of the old man, and he was led forward, through a gate and into a big garden where, in the middle of a close-cut lawn, a gnarled, old yew-tree spread out its twisted branches. Beyond was a big house, dark and seemingly deserted, and Mr. Flannagan and the others paused in the shade of the tree to stare at the house fixedly.

"Who's the owner, did you say, Slim?" whispered Mr. Flannagan.

"Woman named Carruthers," muttered Mr. Slim. "Widow of a shipowner. There's tons of good stuff in there for us."

"Have I met her?"

"Yes. I pointed her out in the hotel. The dark party with the sables."

Part of the whisper reached Jimmy's ears, and he looked up, disappointed.

"A dark party in the stables?" he said. "But I thought it was going to be a nice one. Aren't we going to have any lights at our party?"

"Shut up," growled Mr. Slim, "else you won't get any cake!"

For ten minutes they remained there, whispering. Then the three men moved swiftly and on tiptoe across the lawn. Mr. Flannagan followed, on tiptoe, also, beckoning Jimmy to come after him.

"Why are you walking like that, Mr. Flannagan?" asked Jimmy in a whisper, and feeling rather excited. "Have you got a nail in your boot?"

"Sh-h! Don't make a noise, my dear!" The old man turned and spoke under his breath as he took Jimmy's hand and led him up the wide front steps to the front door. "The lady who lives here gave us permission to have a party in her house provided we didn't make any noise and wake people up."

He groped in his pocket, and then let out a grunt of pretended disappointment.

"There now, what an old silly I am!" he muttered. "I've forgotten the key. What shall we do, Slim?"

"We don't want to go back," muttered Mr. Slim, with a grin. "We'll have to get through the fanlight."

"I suppose we'd better!" Mr. Flannagan returned his wink with interest. "This is where Jimmy can help us. What a lucky think we were practising this afternoon! Come on, Jimmy!"

He took from his pocket the small oilcan with which he had taught Jimmy that afternoon to oil a bolt so that it slid back easily and without noise, and put in in Jimmy's hand. Then he stooped and lifted him against the door.

"Now," he whispered, "up you go! And don't make a sound. That's it. Now, feet first. That's fine!"

Feeling rather puzzled but proud that he could help, Jimmy squeezed through and dropped without noise on to the thick mat inside. A few minutes and he had oiled and slipped the bolts, drawn the chain and the latch, and the door opened inwards. Mr. Flannagan entered quietly, beaming his delight.

"Splendid! Splendid!" he whispered. "Now wait here, like a good boy."

Breathless, Jimmy waited while the three other men stole across the hall. He saw torches flash for an instant as they passed from room to room and up the carpeted stairs. Presently one of the men came back with something heavy in a sack, while behind him Mr. Slim came staggering under the weight of several fur coats, which he heaped in the hall. From the third man Mr. Flannagan took a small jewel box, his small eyes glinting greedily. He turned to Jimmy.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Run and put this in the car!"

Jimmy did as he was bidden, wondering what it was all about. It seemed a queer sort of party. Where was the cake and stuff that Mr. Flannagan had promised?

He stole back across the lawn, then stopped with a gasp as there came the sudden loud ringing of a bell in the house, followed by shouts and a shrill whistle which startled him. What was the matter?

He drew back quickly into the shadow of the yew-tree as two figures appeared at the gate and dashed towards the house. Policemen! His heart stopped beating for a moment; then in sudden terror he turned and scrambled up the tree, crouching low on one of the branches, hiding.

He shivered as a startling scream came then from the house, in the hall and windows of which lights had leapt up suddenly. A deafening report, like that of a gun, rang out, followed by hoarse shouting.

"There they go! Quick! Stop them!" shrieked a woman's voice.

Trembling, Jimmy clung to the tree as he saw figures dart out and race towards the gate. He saw the form of Mr. Slim, running as if for his life. Behind him came the others, dragging Mr. Flannagan between them. They disappeared through the gate, and then there came the roar of a car, the flash of headlights moving swiftly down the lane.

Jimmy's heart sank as he realised what was happening. They had gone; they were leaving him behind. With a gasp he released his hold and half dropped, half fell, from the tree.

"Wait for me! Oh, please wait for me!" he cried brokenly, as he ran for the gate.

But in the same instant heavy steps came behind him and a hand gripped him by the arm, holding him as in a vice.

"Here, half a minute!" said a gruff, breathless voice.

And a cold shiver of fear went through Jimmy as the light of a torch threw the shadow of a policeman across the lawn before him. "Where are you going?"

"Where is Jimmy?"

"JESS! Quick!" There was a break in Joe Blake's voice as he hammered on the bed-room door. "Jimmy's gone! They—they've taken him away!"

He waited, his heart thumping, as Jess sprang from her bed and scrambled into her clothes. When she appeared, her oval face was white as a sheet.

"Gone, Joe? Where?"

"I don't know. He's not in his room. We must go and see!" Joe seized her hand and dragged her down the stairs, a sense of disaster in his heart. "Jess," he said brokenly, "I knew that old man wasn't to be trusted. I knew it!"

"But what can have happened, Joe? Where have they taken him?"

"I don't know. I——"

He stopped short as a light appeared below and there came a sound of running feet in the hall. Peering over the banisters, he saw three men stagger into the living-room, one with blood on his face. They were half carrying, half dragging between them the exhausted figure of Mr. Flannagan. Jess trembled and went icy cold.

"Joe, what is the matter down there?"

His face drawn, Joe put a finger to his lips and sped silently below. The door of the living-room was slightly open, and he peeped inside. On the couch Mr. Flannagan lay, panting and cursing. The other men were quarrelling. Mr. Slim was pacing the room, livid with anger. Joe saw him swing round upon the man whose face was smeared with blood.

"You fool! It was your fault! Didn't I warn you not to show a light? Another minute and we'd have been clear away!"

Mr. Flannagan groaned.

"Where's the boy?" he croaked. "Wh-what happened to him?"

"How do I know? He ran!" snarled Slim. "Didn't I tell you not to bring him?"

The light of fury in his eyes was such that Joe dared not enter and ask the question which was on his lips. Breathless, he waited, watching them, listening. Mr. Flannagan had risen now, and his croaking voice merged with the cursing and quarrelling. Joe caught the words "Beach Lane" and the name "Carruthers." His heart leapt. A Mrs. Carruthers, of Beech Lane, had been one of the customers when he worked for the grocer, Mr. Crabtree. Was that where these men had been? Was that where they had taken Jimmy?

In sudden hope he turned and seized Jess' ice-cold hand.

"Quick!" he whispered.

In an instant he was across the hall and down the lower stairs. The area door was bolted, but he wrenched it open and sprang out. Jess followed him breathlessly up and out into the road.

"Where are you going, Joe?" she panted.

"To find Jimmy. I believe I know where he is. This way!" he cried hoarsely.

"Beech Lane!" The name was on Joe's lips as he raced on down this street and that. He knew the way well.

Suddenly he stopped short, turning into a lane with a high hedge on each side, peering at a name-plate on the corner. Yes, this was it. He dragged Jess forward, pausing again by a narrow gate in the hedgerow.

He flung open the gate and stared at the house beyond. A light from a lower window sent a beam across the lawn to a gnarled yew-tree in the middle. Jess' heart was thumping now so much she could hardly breathe.

"Joe, why—why do you think he is here?"

Joe did not answer. His hand just tightened on hers as he moved swiftly and silently over the lawn, pausing by the window. A curtain had been drawn across it, but there was a narrow chink through which he could see at the bottom.

He threw himself down and pressed his face to the glass, peering inside. He saw a lady in a dressing-gown seated on a sofa, and a man was bending over her. She seemed to be crying. Wriggling forward on the wet grass, Joe twisted himself to peer in farther.

As he did so his heart seemed to turn to ice inside him. By the fireplace a little boy stood, his face pale.

It was Jimmy, and towering over him were the stalwart figures of two policemen, scowling down.

(What will happen to little Jimmy? Don't miss the thrilling instalment in next Saturday's JESTER.)

POCKET-MONEY PRIZES FOR READERS.

MY DEAR READERS,—In response to numerous requests from readers, I have arranged an interesting competition for you. It is a "Best Letter" Competition, and I am offering EIGHT HALF-CROWNS FOR THE EIGHT BEST LETTERS SENT IN TO ME BEFORE DECEMBER 9TH.

All you have to do is to read carefully through the stories and pictures in this number, and then write and tell me WHICH STORY AND SET OF PICTURES YOU LIKE BEST.

If there happens to be a feature that does not appeal to you, don't be afraid to mention it and suggest what you would like to see in its place. It is letters of criticism that I want.

Address your letters to The JESTER Office, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

Don't miss this opportunity of earning a little pocket-money. Sit down and write your letter now.

Cheerio all, and best of luck!

Your sincere friend,

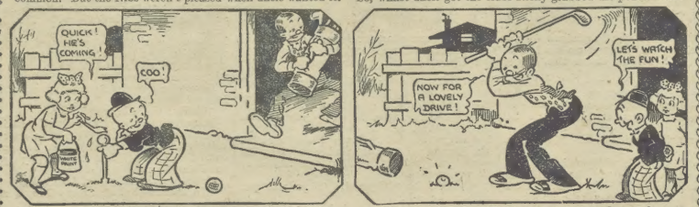
THE EDITOR.

7-12-29

UNCLE SQUIBS AND HIS NAUGHTY NIBS

1. T'other day as ever was, Nicky and Sis came hurrying home to show Uncle Squibs a golf ball they'd found on the common. But the Nibs weren't pleased when uncle wanted it.

2. "If he starts playing with it we'll never see it again, Sis!" said Nicky. "I'm going to play a little joke on him." So, whilst uncle got the clubs Nicky grabbed the poker. Yes!



3. "Bury it up to the hilt there, Sis," said Nicky, pushing the poker well and truly into the ground. "That's right! Now just a dab of white paint and that will do the trick!"

4. Out came uncle with his pet driver, and soon he was ready to give that poker a most hearty biff. And standing near by Nicky and Sis looked on and did a couple of grins.

5. Of course, uncle smashed his club! Yes, that poker did the trick even better than Nicky had thought. "Coo!" said Nicky. "That's caused it! I bet he goes to sleep now, Sis!"

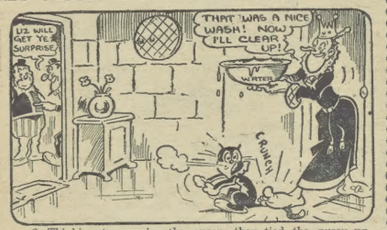
6. And uncle was out for quite half an hour. Yes, Nicky and Sis had their game without any interference, and uncle's bump made quite a fine tee. Nicky only hit it once more, too!

LIZZIE AND HER COMICAL COURTIERS

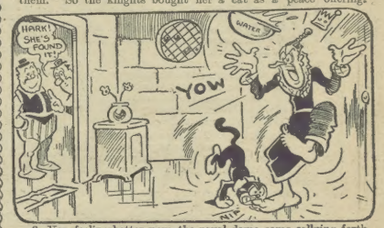
FRANCIS HAKE — WALTER RALLY

THE QUEEN'S NEW CAT NEARLY CAUSES A CATASTROPHE!

1. Sir Walter Rally and Sir Francis Hake had trodden on Lizzie's pet corn, and the old lass had been very annoyed with them. So the knights bought her a cat as a peace offering.



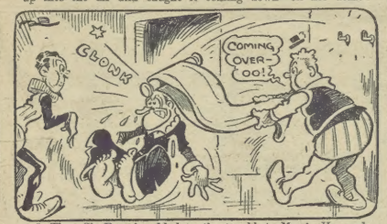
2. Thinking to surprise the queen, they tied the pussy up to a hook by the royal boudoir, where Queenie had gone to bathe her aching foot. In a tick or two she tripped gaily out.



3. Yes, feeling better now, the royal dame came sallying forth to do a spot of clearing up, trod on the poor pussy's tail, and started quite a young war. Then that cat got quite upset.

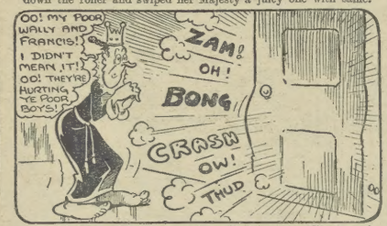
4. And so did Liz! Yes, so surprised was she to have her royal tootsie bitten that she shrieked, threw the bowl of water up into the air and caught it coming down—on her dome!

5. So it happened that when Sir Wally and Sir Francis rolled up to receive the Queen's smiling thanks, they saw her looking all dizzy and feeling somewhat wet and watery. Yes, she was wet!

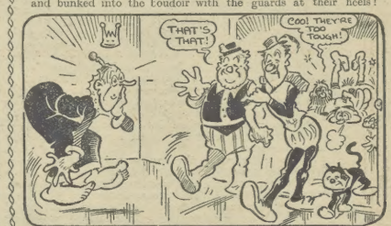


6. Then Sir Francis added to the trouble! Mps! He made a grab at a towel to wipe the royal face, but instead dragged down the roller and swiped her Majesty a juicy one with same.

7. This time Lizzie got really cross! Yes, in her temper she called for the guards. Wally and Francis saw trouble ahead, and bunked into the toudoir with the guards at their heels!



8. Then ensued great commotion! Lizzie's temper disappeared and she began to feel sorry for her favourites. "Oo!" she wailed. "Hark at them! My poor boys! I didn't mean it, knights!"



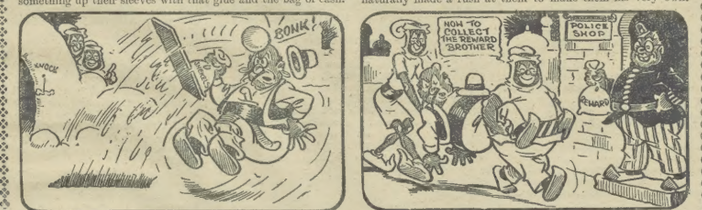
9. Then the door opened and Lizzie shrank back, expecting to see Sir Wally and Sir Francis come out on stretchers. But no such thing happened. Those knights came out smiling! Rather!

10. And Lizzie was so pleased to see them that she ordered a feast there and then. "It is good to have such strong men about me!" said she. "I'm glad you won, dear boys!" 7-12-29

Seezum & Squeezum, the Artful Arabs.

1. One peep at the above old-fashioned oil-painting and you will at once guess that Seezum and Squeezum are up to some mischief or other. Yes, those artful Arabs must have something up their sleeves with that glue and the bag of cash.

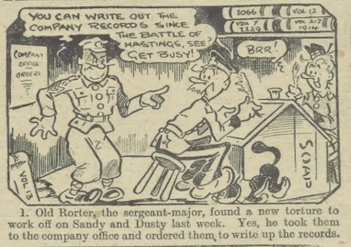
2. Several half-hours later, Ali Ben Badlad came hurrying in from a hard day's banditting, and when he spotted a bag of shekels lying spare on the desert near his cave he naturally made a rush at them to make them his very own.



3. But no sooner had he grabbed the shekels than up came the board which those artful Arabs had stuck the bag to, and with the board came a tidy old chunk of rock, which forthwith proceeded to biff the Badlad person a real zonk!

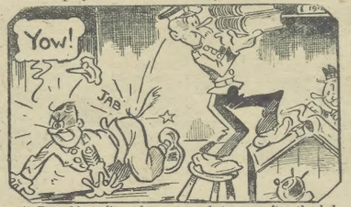
4. And now you can see the end of a perfect wheeze. Away went Seezum and Squeezum to the bad lad depot and quickly handed over their capture to P.-c. Ali Bazooka, who trotted out with a nice bag of real shekels as a reward! Cheers!

SANDY AND DUSTY THE REGIMENTAL RASCALS



1. Old Rorter, the sergeant-major, found a new torture to work off on Sandy and Dusty last week. Yes, he took them to the company office and ordered them to write up the records.

2. What the old lad wanted was a history of the regiment starting from the year dot, and that meant eight hours work per day for seven days a week for the rest of the year. Mps!



3. But things livened up somewhat soon after the lads started on their task. Rorter was finding umpteen volumes for the job, and Dusty was getting one down when he dropped his pen.

4. Not only did Rorter get a severe jab in the pants, but when, a tick later, Dusty spotted his pen, he stooped down to get it and started another drop of trouble for Rorter!

5. Yes, the old sergeant-major was simply overwhelmed at the mass of literature that fell on him. "Coo!" said Sandy. "What a head he must have! Look at the books he's getting!"

6. And Rorter was so dazed and dizzy after that downfall that he simply lay where he had fallen, whilst those rascals nipped away to the canteen and partook of a small cocoa.

Jessie Joy, Just Like a Boy.

1. Our joyful Jessie Joy was so keen to read her copy of "Merry and Bright," that she read it on the way home from the newsagents. Now, before you could say "knife," Sophie Slink came on the scene and started to have a cheap read.

2. But Sophie was somewhat taken back when suddenly Jessie turned her comic inside out to read the stories. Yes, Sophie got a fruity one in the features and wondered just how it had all happened. Then she got really wild. Mps!

3. Yes, seizing her purse, which was rather a hefty one, she came rushing at Jessie, meaning to give the little lass a real old domino. "Grrh!" she growled. "You can laugh! Now it's my turn to have some larks!" It was, an' all!

4. But Sophie wasn't expecting the "Larks" that she got! You see, as she swung her hand round with the purse in same a passing newsboy heard her talk about having some larks, and thought she was a customer. She got the "Larks" all right!

JERRY JONES AND UNCLE BONES

Don't miss this complete story if you enjoy a hearty laugh.

AS Jerry Jones hurried out into the street through the gate of the builder's yard where he was employed as assistant carpenter, he almost bumped into his landlady's pretty daughter, Ethel Bright.

"Hallo! Where are you off to now, Jerry?" inquired the girl, with a cheery smile which displayed her flashing white teeth.

"To Oakleigh Farm," replied the boy. "I've got to do one or two odd jobs there for Mr. Weston. Would you like to come along to the farm and have a look over it this afternoon?"

"Rather!" smiled Ethel. "That is, if Mr. Weston wouldn't mind."

"I'm sure he wouldn't," said Jerry. "I hear that he is an extremely nice man, and welcomes visitors to his farm. He may give you a few samples of his dairy produce to take home to your mother."

"I'm on that!" shouted a squawking voice; and Jerry glanced up with a smile at his pet parrot, Uncle Bones, who was perched on his shoulder. "I'd like an armful of fairy whats-a-name. Not half!" shouted the wily old bird.

Both Jerry and Ethel laughed heartily.

"I said sample—not armful, uncle," said the boy. "You'll have to wash your ears!"

"Not till Friday!" croaked the parrot.

"Oh! Why?" said Jerry, looking surprised.

"'Cos that's me bath-night!" returned the wily old bird, with an almost human chuckle.

"Well, you are the limit, uncle!" laughed Ethel. "Now, look here, Jerry," she added, turning to her chum. "I'll be along at the farm about three o'clock. You'll look out for me, won't you?"

"Sure I will," replied Jerry. And with a cheery wave of his hand the boy set off for Oakleigh Farm, with Uncle Bones perched jauntily on his shoulder.

Mr. Weston was out when Jerry arrived, but the farmer had left instructions for him with one of his men, an old man named Dooley, who had been in his employ for a number of years.

He was a quiet, inoffensive man, with an old-fashioned tuft of whiskers on his chin, which Uncle Bones soon spotted.

"Hallo, nanny!" shouted the bird. "Let's have a swing on your beard."

To Jerry's surprise, the old man did not fly into a temper, but gave vent to a throaty chuckle as he wagged his grey head slowly from side to side.

"That be a foine bird you have there, sonny," he said. "But I shouldn't let Pete Bilson see him, if I were you."

"Why? Who's Pete Bilson?"

"He be one of the farm-hands here," went on the old man, "and he bullies everybody. He trics to boss the show when Mr. Weston's away. Why, if he gets to hear that the guv'nor gave me the instructions for you, he'd be that wild that I don't know what he'd do to me!"

"But why don't you report him to Mr. Weston?" said Jerry. "I'm sure he wouldn't allow him to bully you like that."

"I know he wouldn't," replied the old man. "But I be afraid of Bilson. He'd kill me if I reported him, and all the farm-hands here let him have his own way." The old man paused, and glanced furtively around, as if expecting to see Bilson creeping up behind him, and he heaved a sigh of relief when he found that he and Jerry were still alone.

"If—if Bilson asks you who gave you your instructions, don't tell him that I did, will you?" he went on, in a low whisper. "He'd—he'd smash me if he knew, because he is as jealous as he is bad tempered."

Jerry smiled and shook his head slowly. "Don't you worry, Mr. Dooley," he said; "I shan't breathe a word to this fellow Bilson—and thanks for the tip. I'll keep out of his way if I can. What is the fellow like?"

"Oh, you can't mistake him!" said the old man. "He's a tremendous fellow—about twice your size—with a mop of red hair."

"Then I mustn't let uncle see that," smiled Jerry. "He doesn't like people with red hair, and he's sure to make some remark about it. Come on, uncle; you'd better go to sleep," he added, placing his pet comfortably inside his coat pocket. "And now I think I'll get on with my work, Mr. Dooley, and you can rely upon me not to say a word to this fellow Bilson."

As the old man hurried away, Jerry unpacked his tools and started repairing the door of one of the cow-sheds. He had almost completed the job, and was just congratulating himself that the bullying Bilson had not put in an appearance, when a harsh voice sounded immediately behind him:

"Now, then, what are you doing here?"

One glance at the tall figure that towered above him was enough for Jerry. He knew in a flash that the man now confronting him with a scowl on his rugged, unshaven features was Pete Bilson, and his hand slid to his coat pocket, where Uncle Bones was concealed, for he knew that if his pet appeared now and saw Bilson's mop of red hair there would be trouble.

"I'm repairing the cow-sheds," he said pleasantly, indicating with a jerk of his thumb the job he had almost completed.

"Huh! I can see that! I've got eyes in my head, ain't I?" growled Bilson. "But what I want to know is, who gave you orders to do this job?"

"Mr. Weston, of course," replied Jerry. "You don't suppose I'm working here without orders, do you?"

The bully's thick lips tightened, and his heavy brows met in a frown that almost concealed his pig-like eyes.

"I don't want any sauce from you, you young cub!" he snarled. "I know you've had orders, but Mr. Weston left here early this morning. I'm boss of this outfit when he's away, and it's funny that he didn't leave any instructions with me about these cow-sheds. Who told you to get on with this job? Come on, out with it! There's going to be some trouble here, and you'll be the first to find it if you don't loosen your tongue!"

Jerry realised that it was going to be extremely difficult to keep Mr. Dooley's name out of this argument, and he was just choosing his words carefully before making his reply, when the thing he dreaded most happened, and Uncle Bones came fluttering out of his pocket, to perch himself on the boy's shoulder.

"Oh, look at old red-nob!" suddenly shouted the parrot. "Call out the fire brigade, somebody! Phew! It ain't half hot here!"

For a moment there was a tense silence following the parrot's remarks, and Jerry saw Pete Bilson's massive frame stiffen suddenly.

"Who—who said that?" he spluttered at last.

"I did, old carroty-nob!" squawked Uncle Bones. Then, as Bilson's bullet head jerked forward like a snake about to strike, the parrot shouted quickly: "Coo! Ain't you got an ugly mug!"

This remark so flabbergasted the bully that he lost all power of speech, and just stood staring at the parrot, his little eyes almost darting from his head, and his big fists clenched so tightly that the knuckles showed white through the dirt.

"I'm sorry my pet made that remark about your hair," blurted out Jerry quickly. "He doesn't mean to be rude, really, but he always——"

He got no further, for the bully suddenly lunged forward, and his big fist streaked out to grab Uncle Bones from the boy's shoulder, but the wily old bird was not to be caught napping, and as Jerry swayed swiftly to one side the parrot flew straight up in the air, with the result that Bilson, unable to pull up in time, went crashing into the side of the cow-shed, and collapsed into a large bath of whitewash!

"Oh, look what you've done now, ginger-nob!" croaked Uncle Bones from the top of the cow-shed. "You've messed up your best Sunday suit! Won't your old mum be wild with you!"

"I'll make a mess of you when I lay my hands on you!" snarled the bully, as he scrambled out of the bath and stood shaking himself like a dog after a swim. "I'll wring your confounded neck! And as for you," he added, turning swiftly and grabbing Jerry roughly by the coat collar, "I'll put you in a safe place until I've dealt with your squawking parrot!"

"Let go, you hulking lout!" cried Jerry, struggling furiously to free himself from the man's powerful grip. "You've only got your own self to blame for what has happened. My pet didn't mean any harm, but you've got such a foul temper that you are always looking for trouble. Let go, you brute!"

Bilson gave vent to a throaty chuckle.

"I'll let you go in a minute, you little rat!" he snarled. "I'm going to drop you down the well, where you will be safe while I wring your parrot's neck! Then I'll come back and deal with you!"

Thud!

Jerry's clenched fist crashed against the bully's jaw, but the boy might just as well have hit a stone wall for all the effect it had on the man, and the next moment he felt himself whisked off his feet, with his arms pinned helplessly to his sides. Then a big hand was clapped over his mouth, stifling the shouts for help that rose to his lips.

With his head hanging dangerously close to the ground, Jerry was unable to see where he was going, but some minutes later, when Bilson pulled up beside the well, the boy realised, with a sinking feeling within him, that he was on the outskirts of the farm, and completely shut off from the outbuildings.

"This well is nigh on a hundred feet deep," chuckled Bilson, still keeping a firm grip on the boy, "and you can shout here till Domesday, and nobody will hear you! Now, in you go in this bucket, and if you wriggle too much you'll fall out—and a hundred-foot drop won't do you much good; so if you take my tip you'll sit nice and quiet until I come and fetch you after I've wrung your parrot's neck!"

Perched as he was on the brink of the well, Jerry's position was too dangerous to struggle now, and as he peered into the murky depths a cold shiver went snaking down his spine.

The next moment he found himself huddled in the bucket and swinging perilously over the space. Then, as Bilson slowly turned the creaking handle of the well, he felt himself drop inch by inch down the moss-covered walls.

With staring eyes he looked up, to see Bilson's distorted features leering down at him, and it was with a feeling of relief that he saw them gradually grow fainter and more indistinct as he dropped lower and lower into the slimy depths of the well.

Suddenly the bucket ceased to drop, and he gazed up into the narrow circle of light, which failed to penetrate the intense darkness around him, and saw Bilson's head in black silhouette peering down at him.

"You're about fifty feet down now," shouted the bully, "and if you're foolish enough to fall out of the bucket you'll have a fifty-foot drop to the water! I'd sit nice and quiet, if I were you, until I come for you with your dead parrot. Olive oil, as they say in French!"

Jerry made no reply as he saw Bilson move away, but a deep fear was tearing at his heart, not for his own personal safety, but for the safety of his pet. He knew that Bilson had made no idle threat when he said that he would wring uncle's neck, and although he knew that his pet was cute enough to keep out of the bully's way, a terrible, haunting fear gripped him that perhaps uncle might be caught unawares, and it was this fear that galvanised Jerry to action at the risk of his own life.

In the intense darkness that enveloped him he was unable to see the side of the well, and even when he quickly stretched out his hand he was unable to reach it.

"If I did manage to swing myself to the wall, I should not be able to climb it," he muttered. "It's too smooth and slimy to get a grip.

Jerry soon realised that there was only one way of getting out of the well, and that was by climbing the rope. It would be a long and perilous climb, but the boy did not think of this; his sole thought was for the safety of his pet parrot.

Clutching the rope above his head with both hands, he pulled himself slowly to his feet. Then, as he glanced up at the small circle of light above, a low gasp of surprise broke from his lips as he saw two heads appear over the brink of the well, and the next moment a voice came floating down to him:

"Jerry! Jerry, are you there?"

It was Ethel's voice, anxious and inquiring.

"Yes—I'm quite safe, Ethel!" he shouted back. "I was just about to climb up the rope. Who is that with you?"

"It's me—Sam Dooley," came the reply. "I—I saw Bilson carrying you over here, but I was too scared to interfere. And then I met your friend. She's got your parrot quite safe, but we must get you out before Bilson comes back. If you sit tight in the bucket we'll wind you up to the top!"

It was only a matter of seconds before Jerry clambered over the side of the well and shook both Ethel and Mr. Dooley warmly by the hand.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "That fellow Bilson has given me a scare! But where did you find uncle, Ethel?" he added, turning to his chum.

"I didn't find him—he found me," replied the girl. "And the first thing he said to me was, 'Come and see old ginger-nob!' Who's ginger-nob, Jerry?"

"That's Bilson. He's got a mop of red hair, and as soon as uncle saw it the trouble started. But look here, Bilson's coming back here for me, and I'm going to scare the life out of him!"

"You'll never do it, Jerry!" broke in Mr. Dooley. "He's like a fiend let loose when his temper's roused, and when he comes back and finds you've gone, he'll—he'll kill somebody. No; let's get back to the farmhouse and keep out of his way until Mr. Weston returns. He should be back at any moment now!"

"All right!" nodded Jerry. "But I'll fix up my little scare for him first."

And with Ethel and old Mr. Dooley watching him with puzzled expressions on their faces, he began rubbing the rope that was attached to the bucket against the rough stone parapet of the well.

"Do you see the idea, Ethel?" he said with a grin, as the last strand of the rope was severed and he dropped the bucket with a splash into the well. "When Bilson returns here and finds the rope frayed and broken and the bucket gone, he'll think that I've dropped into the water, and will get the fright of his life!"

Mr. Dooley chuckled so heartily that his goatee beard waggled in a comical fashion.

"I'd like to see his face when he finds the bucket has gone!" he gurgled.

"That's just what we are going to do," smiled Jerry. "We'll wait here and watch the fun. There's plenty of room for us to hide behind that clump of bushes over there, and we shall get a clear view of the well."

The chums and old Mr. Dooley did not have to wait long for the return of Bilson. The bully soon tired of his fruitless search for Uncle Bones, and as he made his way towards the well his anger increased with every stride.

"I'll make that kid suffer for this!" he muttered. "I'll make him stay down the well all night! I'll show him!"

As he reached the well and peered down, Jerry nudged Ethel and chuckled softly to himself.

"Hi, you little rat!" shouted Bilson down the well. "I've wrung your parrot's neck, and I've decided to keep you down there all night! D'you here?"

The bully waited a few seconds, and then, as no sound came from the well, he grabbed the rope and pulled on it. To his utter amazement, the rope came flying up to him, minus the bucket! And as he stood staring at the frayed end his face went as white as a sheet, and a hollow groan broke from his thick lips.

"Suffering snakes, the rope's busted!" he gasped. "The boy's drowned! I—I've k-killed him! Oh, great heavens! What shall I do—what shall I do?"

And to the chums surprise they saw the bully collapse on the ground, with his head buried in his arms, while his massive frame shook with sobs from head to feet.

For some seconds the trio behind the bushes watched him, and then, unable to stand the sight any longer, Jerry dashed out and tapped Bilson on the shoulder.

"It's all right," he whispered. "Mr. Dooley and my chum helped me out of the well. I'm quite safe."

As Bilson gazed up at Jerry a horrified look sprang into his eyes, and he covered his face with his hands.

"It's the boy's ghost come to haunt me!" he wailed pitifully. "There will be no rest for me now. I'll go to the police and give myself up!"

It was some minutes before Mr. Dooley could convince Bilson that Jerry was alive and well, and when he did, Bilson was a changed man.

"If you tell Mr. Weston what I did it will mean the sack for me!" he groaned. "I know I deserve any punishment, but I don't want my wife and kiddies to suffer for my evil work!"

"Neither do we," smiled Jerry, "and if you vow not to bully the men on the farm again, Mr. Dooley and I will promise to keep this little affair a secret."

Needless to say, Bilson made the vow, and, what is more, he kept it, for when Jerry and Uncle Bones met him in the High Street some weeks later, and uncle greeted him with "What-ho, me old ginger-nob!" the burly farm-hand chuckled heartily at the remark, and gave the parrot a knob of sugar.

(There will be another complete adventure of Jerry Jones, Uncle Bones, and Ethel Bright in next Saturday's JESTER. Order your copy to-day.)

7-12-29

A tale of a young Western cowboy who, in spite of his dying outlaw father's advice, is driven to take the six-gun trail against a notorious rustling rancher. You can START TO-DAY!

The Gun-trail!

SO it had come! Sonny Harding had always felt that it would; but hadn't expected it quite so soon after the death of his outlaw dad.

The gun-trail! And he was riding it with these two men who must be outlaws themselves!

They had dragged him out of a nasty position, it is true. Bullseye Burk, the hated enemy of his family, the man who had hounded his father to his death, had almost got his talons on him, too. Then Slim and Buck had come to his aid, beating Burk just in the very moment of victory.

Even now, far back on the trail, Burk's men were hunting for him; would go on hunting him until they brought him down.

He thought of his father then, and that awful night in Bueno cantina. The last look on his dying father's face; those last words muttered in his ear.

"Keep clear of six-guns! Never ride the gun-trail!"

The gun-trail! And he was riding it now!

For a moment he longed for his old dad to be standing by his side. Shoulder to shoulder, how they could have faced the world together!

Why hadn't he shot it out with Burk back there in the saloon? Why hadn't he gone for his guns and ended it all one way or the other?

Buck pulled to a halt to give the horses a breather. It was then that Sonny was able to say what hitherto had seemed a little out of place.

"I ought to thank you chaps for getting me out of a tight corner," he said. "The only thing I got against you, Malloy, is that you stopped me shooting it out with Burk when I had a chance. I wasn't crying out for any help, and I'm thinking I might just as well have gone for my guns, and——"

"If you'd had anything but a dead man's chance, d'ye think I'd have stopped you?" snapped Malloy. "I hate Burk as much—probably more than you do, Harding. Not until that coyote is broken and dead will I lay down my six-guns and call a halt to riding these trails. I want to see Burk in the dust—and I'd give much to have your chance of bringing him there, Sonny. I'd like to kill him myself—I'd swing for the satisfaction of seeing him through my smoke!"

He was silent for a moment, but his eyes blazed his hatred.

"You might have got Burk back there," he went on. "But you'd never have lived to know about it. Ain't much sense in getting your man if you're going to drop full o' lead a moment later."

Sonny nodded. There was sense in this.

"The man who gets Bullseye Burk has got to break him first," went on Buck. "Has got to break his power, strip him of his ranch-lands, and cause the horde of gunmen that he employs to leave him on his own. Only then can a man tackle Burk with any hope of living afterwards. It's a big order, but it's the only way."

"You're right," said Sonny, after a pause. "I see that now, Buck. Burk would have wiped me out with his gang if you hadn't butted in. My dad fought pretty hard that—that I might live. What do we aim to do now?"

Buck Malloy turned slowly. Slim Hankins drew a little nearer. Both leaned towards him slightly, and together they uttered two words.

"Smash Burk!"

Sonny felt that they were both watching him and waiting for his reply. He wanted to throw in his lot with them. He had taken a sudden liking to both of them, and the way they had pulled him away from under Burk's nose.

But he knew that it meant riding the gun-trail permanently. His father had fought so very hard to prevent that.

Then he suddenly recalled the charges that Burk had made against him. Already he had been branded as a killer and a horse-thief by the cattle-boss of this district. Already men were hunting him on these false charges. He would always be a hunted man while Burk lived.

Yes, he was already riding the gun-trail; forced into it by the treachery of the man who had killed his dad.

He was smiling when he looked up and caught a hand of each of his companions in his own.

"The three of us," he muttered tensely. "All three riding with one set purpose—to smash Burk!"

His teeth flashed in a grin that made him look more like his dead father than ever.

They mounted and were about to ride on again when Buck sidled his horse in close to Sonny's.

He was still somewhat solemn, and his eyes regarded the boy with hope, and something that seemed very like fear.

"I sure hope that you can draw them six-guns like your dad could, Sonny!" he said tensely. "Our success depends almost entirely on that!"

Sonny did not answer, for Buck broke into a gallop then, and they headed straight for the hill country. For the rest of the day until sunset they rode down rocky ravines and through gorges that were the home of rattlesnakes and a myriad scuttling things that fled at their approach.

"You ought to know that I'm heading for a definite place, Sonny," said Buck, when night had fallen at last. "Slim and me have got another pard, who runs the Flying A Ranch. The Flying A is the last bit of range-land between Bullseye Burk and the mountains here. Burk hasn't worried much about the Flying A, because our pard, Steve Barlow, don't seem to run a herd. Steve has got cattle, but he keeps them hidden up in the hills. So far Burk's crowd haven't spotted them; when they do there'll be more butchery like you saw happen on John Russell's J. R. Ranch."

"You see, Sonny," cut in Slim, "Burk claims he owns the whole range up here—and them outfits that he hasn't bought, he's shot down with his Masked Raiders like he shot down John Russell. He picks the sheriff, naturally. That means that no charge against Bullseye Burk or any of his crowd is taken up seriously."

"Burk runs his own cows with the aid of Mex riders," went on Buck. "The white men he employs are supposed to be horse-breakers—though there ain't above a couple of hundred broncs, all saddle-broke, in his outfits. It's the white fellows that are his Masked Raiders. Now and again a few of them get shot up, but Burk always replaces them pronto. Most of them drift down here from the county gaol—some of them are on their way there when Burk steps in and grabs them. Nobody else would hire men of the kidney that Burk keeps around him. We tried once to run a man for sheriff against the man that Burk put up. Our man was found full of lead on the night before the election. Since then nobody feels like bucking against this big boss. Can beginning to see what we're up against, Sonny?"

Sonny nodded, watching the narrowed eyes of Buck Malloy. He was thinking of the feud that went back to the days of his dead dad's father, the feud that had sent Glyn Harding to his death.

Even now Sonny knew that the self-same feud was weaving its net about him, too.

Action!

THEY continued their ride, and Buck Malloy did not ease his horse from a gallop until the great, gaunt hills of the range loomed overhead.

Then, at a walk now, they took a narrow path, which the horses seemed to know.

Sonny was thoughtful; a little suspicious, too. Buck's words had stuck in his mind.

Why had the tall, gaunt Buck Malloy said that almost everything depended on how Sonny himself could draw his guns?

Were they going to make him a scapegoat in some sordid gun battle? Let him do the shooting just because tradition said that he was faster on the draw than they?

Buck seemed to sense the boy's thoughts, for the words he spoke unconsciously answered the boy's thoughts.

"Maybe you're wondering why we want you to fight with us, Sonny," he said. "Well, I may as well tell you that we reckon on you being faster than us. Once before I stood up against Bullseye Burk, and I discovered too late that the men I thought were my pards were Burk's men. They rounded on me when I'd got this cattle boss set dead to rights, as I thought."

He paused and smiled bitterly.

"Burk could have killed me," he went on. "Sometimes I wish he had. But that's not always Burk's way. He had his vengeance in another more terrible way."

Sonny saw Malloy's hands clench savagely at the reins. His face knotted into sullen hate as the man thought back to that fatal day.

Again and again Sonny's guns barked, and he whipped around right and left, pouring a hail of lead across the room where he knew his enemies stood.

Slim Hankins seemed to recognise the signs, and changed the subject hurriedly.

"Let's get a move on, Buck," he said. "I sure am tired and eager to set teeth into some of Steve Barlow's grub. The Flying A ain't more than a mile off now."

Once more they set off, but before long Slim and Buck pulled their mounts to a sudden stop and gazed steadfastly ahead.

Sonny saw a light coming from a long, low-lying cluster of ranch buildings.

Then Slim and Buck slipped from their mounts and began to stalk towards the buildings.

Wonderingly Sonny followed. They had almost reached the door when, near at hand, a cluster of tethered cow-ponies came into view.

Then Buck and Slim broke into a run, dashed through the open door, with Sonny just a fraction of a second behind them.

The cabin glowed in the yellow light of a lamp, and three men whirled suddenly to meet them.

Amazed and bewildered, Sonny saw that the strangers were masked, and almost unconsciously his legs went apart, his shoulders dropped into a gun-fighter's crouch, and his hands hovered over his guns like two vultures above their prey.

Then his eye fastened on the three men. He did not require telling that they were some of Bullseye Burk's Masked Raiders, the men who had shot down his friend John Russell; men who were no doubt concerned in his own dad's death.

One of them still held a gun, the muzzle of which had a thin spiral of smoke curling upwards.

Behind them stood a thick-set rancher, clutching his upper arm. This must be Steve Barlow, Sonny thought.

Then the man with the gun started speaking, fanning his shooter from right to left, covering the three in the doorway.

"Up with 'em!" he snapped. "Get 'em high!"

Buck was smiling a little onesidedly. Then Sonny saw that Buck's hands were going for his guns, where they snuggled in their holsters.

But so slowly! Oh, so slowly!

Buck's hands closed over the butts. The boy expected to see a lightning draw now.

But beads of perspiration stood out on Buck's forehead as he strove to lift the weapons, so very daringly that the astonished Sonny almost gasped aloud.

And then Sonny's hands darted for his own weapons. He saw Slim Hankins, gun in hand, strive to leap in front of the struggling Buck.

The other masked men were grabbing at their weapons now. Slim Hankins' gun had already boomed, and the swaying lamp came crashing down. Luckily it went out, and the cabin was now in total darkness.

But only for the fraction of a moment.

Sonny felt himself grow suddenly cold and strangely deliberate. His guns were thudding lead right and left. He heard a yell which spurred him to greater efforts.

Again and again his guns barked, and he whipped around right and left, with nothing definite to shoot at, pouring a hail of lead across the room where he knew that enemies—his enemies now—stood and defied him.

It seemed an age that that fierce fray lasted. Actually it was but a few minutes, and Sonny came out of what seemed a vivid nightmare to find Slim Hankins at his elbow, slapping him on the back and telling him that it was all right now.

Someone brought a light, and this revealed Buck Malloy standing pantingly against the wall, dabbing at a bullet furrow that had creased him along the top of his head.

Steve Barlow came towards him, pushing one of the fallen masked men out of his way, and smiling now as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

Buck took a step forward and looked deeply into Sonny's eyes for a moment without speaking.

Then impulsively he gripped the boy's hand.

"For a minute I thought it was your dad's ghost come to aid us, pard!" he said tensely. "It had to be Glyn himself here, or his son."

Sonny felt pleased at the simple praise, but he was still wondering about Buck's painfully slow draw.

Slim Hankins had taken up the song of praise.

"Never seen anything like it before!" he ejaculated. "It was Glyn Harding's gun action to the life. We'd never have made it, Buck, but for the way the kid hurled himself into it. That draw—the speed of it! Gosh! I believe he's even faster than his dad! Shake, kid!"

Sonny took the extended hand.

He felt suddenly grown older; felt that at this moment he had left boyhood's days behind. He thought of Aunt Matilda Russell and the happy days he had spent with her, regarding her still as the woman who had been a mother to him.

His thoughts switched to Myra, the girl with whom he had been brought up. Strangely vivid in his memory was their parting and the promises they had made to each other.

Would Myra suffer much when she heard of this affair?

Then suddenly he shook his head and shoulders as if to dispel black thoughts.

He felt older—was older. He was a man now, tried and proven; had taken his place among men.

He had hit the gun-trail; had done just the very thing his dad had never been tired of warning him against. But was he to blame? Was it not rather the working of an inscrutable Fate that had forced his hand?

He had struck the gun-trail and had proved that he was the son of a gunman, the son of the famous Glyn Harding, when it came to emptying a six-gun.

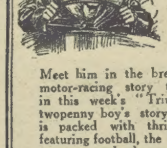
Yes, there was no drawing back now. The inevitable had happened!

In spite of his father's teaching, in spite of his own efforts to keep away from the gunman's life, he had been drawn into it as a flower is drawn to the sun.

It was his fate, his heritage. He could no more help being a gunman than he could help being born the son of a gunman, and he knew now that he must follow his allotted trail to the very end, whatever end there lay ahead of it.

(Another long instalment of this fine Western yarn will appear in next Saturday's JESTER.)

7-12-29



THE LAD WHO LIVED FOR SPEED

Meet him in the breath-robbing motor-racing story that begins in this week's "Triumph," the twopenny boy's story-paper that is packed with thrilling yarns featuring football, the Great War, and adventure.

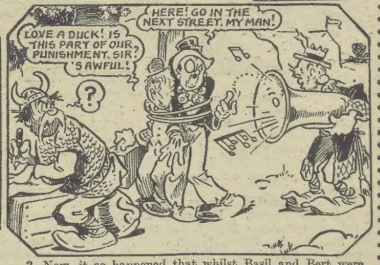
The TRIUMPH 2d. Every Tuesday.

THE WORLD WIDE WANDERINGS OF BASIL & BERT

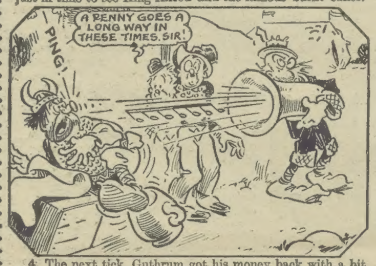
OUR LADS FIND THE GOOD OLD TIMES A LITTLE BIT TOO HECTIC!

1. We're quite sure you haven't forgotten how Basil and Bert made a wonderful discovery of a Time-Machine last Saturday. You remember how they found a quaint little box, which, when they pressed a button, whizzed them right back through centuries until they arrived in the year 878 A.D., just in time to see King Alfred and the famous burnt cakes.

2. You will also remember that after the good housewife had blamed him for burning the jolly old cakes, our lads rambled off and were then captured by some maraunding Danes. Well, now those Danes at once hurried the world-wanderers to their leader, one Guthrum, who caused Basil and Bert to be tied up whilst he plotted plans against the king.



3. Now, it so happened that whilst Basil and Bert were bound to stay where they were bound, a wandering musician, armed with a bassoon and a lot of breath, trickled into the camp and started to trot out a tune. Guthrum, busy with his plans for the overthrow of the king, threw a groat, or some such thing worth about twopence, at the ancient minstrel.



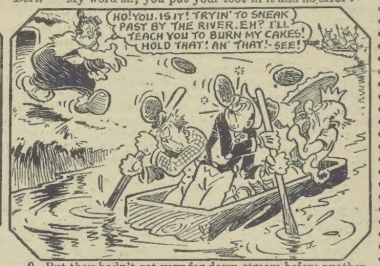
4. The next tick, Guthrum got his money back with a bit of a thud. Yes, that minstrel let loose a blast that was a cross between a windy day and a hurricane; out came the groat and smacked itself well and truly on the Dane's nose. Naturally, Guthrum was annoyed and with a mighty roar, he got to his feet, intending to do all sorts of things at once.

5. "By the bones of the sacred kipper!" snarled the Dane. "No cheap skate of a jazz-minstrel can step into this camp and ding me one on the dome like so! Forsooth will I make mincemeat of thee, thou blower of notes! When I have done with thee thou shalt not be worth the paper you're printed on!" Whereupon, the minstrel frowned and did a shiver!

6. It was then that Basil decided to take a hand—or rather, a foot, in the game. Yes, he had no reason to love Guthrum, and suddenly he shot out his leg in the path of the rushing Dane and brought him down with a thud that must have dented his dentures. "How are the mighty fallen!" cried Bert. "My word sir, you put your foot in it and no error!"

7. "La-diddy-da-da! Oomp-bang-bang!" sang the minstrel and then whipping off his quaint disguise, bothered if he didn't prove himself to be none other than King Alfie himself! "Thanks, boys!" said the old knut. "You sure helped me that time. They'll have to alter the history books when they write the true story of my success over Guthrum!"

8. And right on the spot, King Alfie freed the lads and tied Guthrum up in their places. "This way to the boat, gents!" cooed he, leading the way to the river. "Follow me! I'm going to push the boat out in a tick!" "Good idea!" said Bert. "I could do with a drink myself." In a few ticks all three were safely aboard the quaint old Saxon dug-out.



9. But they hadn't got very far down-stream before another odd spot of trouble showed up. Yes, it seems that Alfie has been up to his old games again. Just before he left to penetrate to Guthrum's camp, he'd been left in charge of another batch of cakes—and these got burnt in the well-known King Alfred manner. Again the good wife got cross!

10. Yes, she heaved the burnt buns at his royaltiness and succeeded in hitting him once or twice. There was no time to hoist the cakes back at her, for bothered if old Guthrum and his merry men weren't on the warpath aiming to have another smack at the king! Something had to be done, and right quickly, too. Then the king had half a brainwave!

11. Basil and Bert were all for landing and trying to run for it—in fact, they stopped the boat with their paddles on an overhanging branch. But, meanwhile, Alfie was busy making a burnt offering to Jupiter and begging that worthy to do something snappy before it was too late. And it seemed that Jupiter must have been watching and listening-in.

12. Anyway, the above is a true and explicit picture of what happened then! Your history books tell you how Alfie defeated Guthrum and his Danes, though for some reason or other they'll not mention the part Basil and Bert played in that great victory. Alfie was most pleased with them and he—but we'll tell you a lot more about that next Saturday!

BASIL AND BERT HAVE MORE FUN AND EXCITEMENT WITH THEIR MARVELLOUS TIME-MACHINE NEXT SATURDAY.

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